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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5955  
INFO RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN PRIORITY 0370  
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 0071  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 7052  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 5139  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 3713  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0919  
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 3785  
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 1068  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2866  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 7637  
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 5320  
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0192  
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORPORATION PRIORITY  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 2008  
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000636

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS  
MCC FOR S GROFF, D NASSIRY, E BURKE AND F REID

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/30/2017

TAGS: PTER PGOV MOPS PREL CE

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: AIR TIGERS BOMB OIL STORAGE FACILITIES  
NEAR COLOMBO

REF: A. COLOMBO 475  
1B. COLOMBO 630

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires James R. Moore, for reasons 1.4(b,d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Between 1:30 a.m. and 2:30 a.m. on Sunday, April 29, while most people were watching Sri Lanka play in the Cricket World Cup finals, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) carried out their third confirmed air attack, damaging Ceylon Petroleum Company oil and gasoline facilities in eastern Colombo, and a Shell LPG facility in Muturajawela, in the northern suburbs of the city. During the Tiger air attack, the Sri Lanka electric utility cut power in Colombo and the military unleashed a barrage of artillery in an unsuccessful attempt to bring down the LTTE planes. Damage from the raid was minor, but some commercial airlines have suspended service to Sri Lanka or are considering doing so. End Summary.

LTTE ATTACK ECONOMIC TARGETS IN COLOMBO

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12. (C) On April 29 at approximately 1:30 a.m., the first of two LTTE light aircraft dropped small, makeshift bombs on a Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC) storage terminal in Kolonnawa, in eastern Colombo, which is co-owned by Indian Oil Corporation. CPC Acting Chairman and Managing Director Methsiri Wijegunawardena told Econoff that the LTTE dropped two bombs, with one landing on top of a large oil tank, causing a wide dispersion of shrapnel. Because the tank contained low-grade "black oil" and the bomb landed on top of the tank, no oil spilled out and the oil did not catch fire. The LTTE light aircraft then circled back to make a second run on the Kolonnawa facility but was deterred by anti-aircraft artillery and was forced to drop its second bomb, this time hitting the edge of another oil tank, which again failed to ignite. DAO sources told us, however, that three or perhaps four bombs landed at this site.

¶3. (C) According to Mr. Wijegunawardena, LTTE aircraft proceeded to Muturajawela, which houses 27 gasoline tanks, where they were met by Sri Lanka Army and local security fire. Muturajawela is in the northern suburbs of the city, approximately 13 miles south of Bandaranaike International Airport. Despite the resistance, the LTTE aircraft dropped one bomb on an internal road within the Muturajawela complex, sending shrapnel into an adjacent water pipe and its control unit, causing water to spill out. A second bomb fell closer to the gasoline tanks, causing a leak in one tank that did not catch fire. All gasoline from the damaged tank has since been transferred by the CPC to undamaged tanks. The LTTE aircraft also targeted a Shell liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) refinery located across the street from the CPC's Muturajawela site, dropping one bomb that did minor damage to some smaller gasoline tanks. LTTE-controlled Tamilnet reported that the planes attacked two, rather than three, sites, leading Wijegunawardena to speculate that the LTTE believed the Shell refinery was actually part of the CPC facility. DAO sources reported another bomb falling near a ceramic factory in Nawala, further to the south, causing minor damage to a boundary wall.

¶4. (SBU) The pro-government Daily News reported that the LTTE attack was a "failure," stating that the two bombs dropped at Kolonnawa fell "harmlessly in a nearby marsh," while the two bombs dropped in Muturajawela caused only minor damage to a water pipe. According to media reports, three security guards were injured at the oil refineries and at least eight people were taken to local hospitals as a result of anti-aircraft artillery and missile casings falling on

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homes in Colombo.

¶5. (C) Air Force spokesman Ajantha De Siva stated that fighters were scrambled immediately after the LTTE's air attack, and that they "identified the locations where the (Tigers) landed and have bombed them successfully." De Silva apparently meant that the presumed landing sites were bombed.

Tamilnet confirmed that the Sri Lankan Air Force retaliated after the LTTE's air raid. However, DAO sources later denied that the military had successfully destroyed the LTTE aircraft.

FOREIGN MINISTRY CALLS IN DIPLOMATS

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¶6. (C) Foreign Minister Bogollagama, joined by Chief of Defense Staff Donald Perera, briefed heads of diplomatic missions on April 30 regarding the latest LTTE raid and made the following points:

- The GSL appreciates actions of the international community to deprive the LTTE of arms and funds, mentioning in particular recent U.S., EU and Indian efforts to investigate LTTE activities.

- The GSL is taking all steps to ensure the safety of the public.

- The GSL is building up Sri Lanka's air defense system to meet this new threat. The GSL seeks the assistance of friendly nations to strengthen and build Sri Lanka's air defense capability.

- According to Air Marshal Perera, the LTTE planes attacked secondary targets, the fuel facilities, because their primary objectives, the airport and port, were too secure.

- Emirates and Cathay Pacific have suspended operations. Negotiations are underway with Emirates to resume daytime service in the next couple of days.

- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will, effective immediately, set up a new operations center and 24 hour

information line to provide updates on airport operations and other services that affect expatriates and tourists.

¶7. (C) Although the latest LTTE raid caused relatively minor damage to oil and gas facilities, the incident will have a significant impact on local commerce (septel). Cathay Pacific has again indefinitely suspended all flights to Sri Lanka; Emirates, which owns a 43 percent stake in Sri Lankan Airlines, has suspended flights for 24 hours while it deliberates further steps. Malaysian Airlines and Singapore Air are reportedly evaluating whether to take similar action.

¶8. (C) COMMENT: The attack, timed when the entire country was watching Sri Lanka play Australia in the Cricket World Cup finals, was clearly calculated to catch the military while distracted and to maximize the propaganda effect. The GSL is trying to portray the Tiger's most recent attack on "secondary targets" as proof of the effectiveness of the countermeasures it has put in place since the previous LTTE strikes on air bases. In fact, the oil and gasoline targets were significant and appeared to be the Tiger's primary targets in this instance. The GSL came away with a scratch, and can count itself fortunate that the tanks that were actually hit contain heavy fuel oil that does not easily ignite.

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